

Sept. 15-16-17
1971
A.F.S.
SALT LAKE CITY

INTERAGENCY RELATIONSHIPS IN FISHERIES PROGRAMS

Discussion of Formal Papers

By

Arthur N. Whitney
Fisheries Division Chief
Montana Fish and Game Department

We have heard three aspects of Interagency relationships in fisheries discussed today.

Dr. Perry and Mr. Marriage have described the operation of one or more of their own agency's programs where Interagency cooperation is working. Mr. Evans and Mr. Murphy have told us of certain problems in Interagency relationships and have suggested some solutions to them. Mr. Gebhards has described what he believes to be the most basic problem in the relationships and predicted no solution is possible within present limits of personnel and financing.

I believe Mr. Gebhards has most closely defined the basic problem and most accurately predicted the immediate future. It is not unusual that Stacy and I should agree. State Fishery Biologists are frequently in the front lines of the battle to save our habitat, and both Stacy and I have received verbal requests within the past two years to leave our respective jobs because of our fishery management activities. These requests have come from some rather influential persons. There has always been a definite camaraderie amongst those who are simultaneously dodging the same bullets. Bill Mauldin's Willie & Joe, while engaged in a considerably more unpleasant war, described this relationship as "The Benevolent and Protective Order of Them What Has Been Shot At."

Messrs. Gebhards, Evans and Murphy have all described a very basic point of the problem, with which I certainly agree, and that is - different agency objectives. But I believe that merely citing different objectives is an over simplification of Interagency Fisheries Management Problems. If, for example, the U. S. Forest Service clearly had only the objective of producing the most timber possible or the Soil Conservation Service professed only the objective of increasing agricultural production, then those agencies would have no interagency problems in fish management or biology for us to discuss this morning. We would instead all be agreeing that their activities were damaging and we would be trying to decide how we could get them to change. Fortunately public opinion does not allow such single-purpose objectives any more. Along with the rest of the environmental protection which is now required of all land managers, we have the objective of preserving and providing for good quality fishing. This has required that fisheries biologists be hired in ever increasing numbers in recent years by these land management agencies. Where these agencies follow the recommendations of their biologists there is little conflict with Federal or State fisheries agencies. But if the new biologists' reports are ignored, or if they are suppressed or altered to whitewash the effects of the agencies' activities on fish habitat, there will definitely be interagency conflict.

Mr. Evans and Mr. Murphy have both called for more and better long-range planning as part of the solution. Better planning I'll agree with, but in my estimation it would be a mistake to require that more of the state agencies' fishery managers' time be spent in planning.

I will admit that one occasionally has to climb high enough to see the forest instead of just the trees, but it seems to me that most of the full-time planners have climbed so high they no longer recognize that individual trees (or management problems) exist. Either that or they have developed a jargon the rest of us do not comprehend, or possibly both are true. As an example, I suggest that when you return home you carefully study the diagram of the planning process in the Bureau of Reclamation's Proposed Plan of Study for the Western U. S. Water Plan. Unlike most processes which have a starting and ending point, this one, although it does have numbered steps, is circular or at least it follows the perimeter of a figure which is closed. One line with a plan at its end leads off this closed figure. That means, I presume, that if the circular path is followed long enough, completed plans will begin to spin off. To try this, however, you'd have to get by the first step which says, "Specific Components of Multi-Objectives Relevant to Planning Settings."

I will certainly admit that some planning is essential and desirable. However, if we ask one of the already over-worked area managers Mr. Gebhards has described to spend several days a month "specifying the components of the multi-objectives relevant to his planning setting" some of the fishing waters for which he is responsible will go totally unmanaged.

While we have heard where Interagencies' cooperation is working, and also where problems have arisen due basically to a difference of objectives, we have not had a discussion of any problems between fishery biologists who work for agencies with almost identical objectives. Years ago it seemed remarkable to me that a federal fish biologist, working for the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, and a state fish biologist, working for a

Fish and Game Department, could be in conflict on a matter of resource management. But this situation does occur and I think the causes for it deserve discussion on this panel.

I believe Mr. Murphy came closest to one reason for this problem when he listed agency provincialism. When you add territoriality of the individual to agency provincialism you have the major reasons for this conflict. Really we biologists are just as territorial as the animals we manage. Except to avoid the painful clutches of little children, our tom cat takes little note of human visitors to our house. But let another cat, male or female, approach and he immediately lets them know what line they better not cross.

Similarly, the state area fish manager takes little note of the movement of, for example, lawyers or accountants in or out of his town. But let a new Federal fish biologist be transferred in and the State man will be quick to define his boundaries.

If all agencies were stable in direction then territoriality and provincialism would cease to be factors for conflict because territories would soon become clearly defined. But agencies are not stable in direction and therefore territories shift and this is the real basis for conflict.

State agencies, because they respond more rapidly to public opinion or local political pressure, are generally less stable in direction over the years than is the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. Thus, in my estimation the Bureau exerts a stabilizing influence on state programs. This is probably to the good for overall fish management in this nation. It is not a situation, however, which tends to make those who stabilize beloved by those who are being stabilized.

A State with pork-barrel politicians firmly in control of a fisheries department is usually prevented from firing all biologists and trained hatchery personnel by the public's constant exposure to the Bureau's example of always having research and management investigations as a part of their programs. On the other hand, consider a State with dedicated professionals in charge that is trying to switch emphasis from stocking catchables to habitat preservation. That State will constantly be annoyed by the annual carrying out of Federal programs that obviously place heavy emphasis on stocking catchables. Neither the pork-barrel politician who wants to buy votes with fish, nor the professional who wants to move his program more rapidly forward, will be appreciative of "stabilization".

I have no solution to offer for this conflict. As I said earlier, I think overall it may serve a good purpose. My only advice is to keep it on as professional a level as the politicians will allow and to remain personally friendly. I have always tried to do that and was rewarded one time by overhearing an older federal biologist say to a younger one, "You'll find that Montana is more critical of our programs than any other state in this region and yet they're the most friendly to individual federal employees." I hope to keep it that way.